

# On Calm Waters





## For a new Alabama lake home, an architect referenced Southern fish camps from a bygone era as his design inspiration

**ARCHITECT JEFFREY DUNGAN** remembers the design challenge. He was asked by a couple to create their vacation home on scenic Lake Martin in Alabama and when he took his first look at the lot, steeply cascading down to the water's edge, he now recalls saying to himself, "How am I going to put a house on the side of this cliff?" It was intimidating."

But the Alabama native, who grew up around lakes, came up with a local vernacular solution to make the home's exterior and interior blend with the waterfront site: He tapped into Lake Martin's culture of fishing.

"This design takes its inspiration from those old, rustic cabins you used to see at fish camps on lakes all across the South," says Dungan, who is based in Mountain Brook, Alabama. "Lake Martin still has some of those structures today. So, I designed the cliff's retaining walls and the pillars on a three-sided entertainment porch, and the compound's fireplaces in Tennessee fieldstone and moss rock. I used antiqued cypress wood on the exterior, and I had pine stained for the interior walls and other elements."

The inviting interiors convey the nostalgic camp aesthetic without fishing paraphernalia on the walls. No glass-eyed, wide-mouthed trophies stare back at you as you eat a fresh-caught dinner. The design also avoids any deliberate fanciness. Back in the day, anglers dining on catfish, two sides, and sweet tea did not require white tablecloths. "I didn't want to use a highfalutin wood like French white oak in the interior, although I use that kind of wood all the time in other projects. This isn't that kind of house. I chose Southern yellow pine to enhance the illusion of a less refined but authentic look from a bygone era."

This spirit of authenticity gives the home a savored sense of place. "Authenticity is a word I use all the time," Dungan says, citing the "authenticity is the new luxury" mantra. "I love that. It fits this house."

The owners agree. "We didn't want a cookie-cutter house that felt like it belonged in suburbia," the husband says. "We wanted a lake house that is rustic but comfortable and elegant. The fish-camp concept appealed to us because it's the best way to integrate the inside and outside."

With its dining porch and other open-air areas for enjoying unobstructed views, the home suits these empty nesters' priorities. "We entertain primarily outside," the husband says. "This house gives us the lifestyle we wanted. We built the house to create a destination where our kids will come back when they get married and have kids. Ideally, my wife and I would like for this to be a legacy property we can pass down through our family."

Natural materials and a neutral palette deliver a tranquil, unpretentious beauty and encourage ease. "The use of wood and stone relax the design," the wife says. "It brings the outdoors in. Wood floors, wood walls, and limestone countertops create an environment that we find very comforting."

Dungan wanted the design to have a clean look. "I like to take traditional vernaculars and sandblast off all of the superfluous ornamentation so you're left with something that's really pure."

The layout reflects that purity. The living room, dining area, and kitchen share one expansive rectangular space. "Again, I was drawing on the tradition of venerable

**Opening pages:** A Texas couple hired architect Jeffrey Dungan to design their second home on Alabama's Lake Martin, with Richard Tubb responsible for the interior design. A fieldstone and moss rock fireplace complements the living room's soothing neutral fabrics with sofa and swivel chair from Lee Industries and Bernhardt armchair. **Left:** Diamond-pattern windows flank a custom chevron-design front door, brightening the entry area.





Southern cabins and dwellings,” Dungan says. “They were from a simpler time, and composed of simple spaces. But I didn’t want simplistic. I put all of these things in the same room, so the trick became how to make the spaces feel different. The living room ceiling is vaulted and beamed. But the ceilings in the kitchen and dining area are flat, so they feel cozier.”

Abundant windows give the camp concept a subtle modern spin. Dungan chose wooden casement windows over traditional double-hung windows to foster a more modern look. He had the sashes and thin muntins painted a dark charcoal color to suggest steel windows.

The architect incorporated a convenience that harks back to country-casual suppers of the past. Kitchen windows allow a busy cook to hand a plate of green beans, crispy hush puppies, and a filet of bass, still sizzling from a skillet, out to the dining porch for an al fresco meal.

Inside, this home also reflects the combined talents of Dungan and Birmingham-based interior designer Richard Tubb. In the dining area, they provided a built-in wooden banquette with cushions and a steel custom table, coated with marine varnish for a polished look. The kitchen island matches the walls. “To keep it simple, we used the same wood,” Dungan says.



“The home has the feeling of a lodge,” Tubb says. “You come in and you want to sit and relax. In keeping with local traditions, this is meant to be a place where you shouldn’t have to worry if someone sits on a couch in a bathing suit or brings in a fresh catch of fish with the water dripping across the floor.”

Tubb believes this home entices the senses. “The wood and stone make it smell good. The simple fabrics make it feel good. We wanted everything about the home to be modern, pared down, not gimmicky.” He was intent, too, that much of the attention within the rooms goes to the views outside rather than to any complicated lines in the furnishings. “I

wanted texture, not pattern,” he adds. “I wanted attention to go to the feel of the fabrics. We have velvets, we have linens. You walk in, and not any one thing captures you. But it just feels right.” ■

**Above left:** In the dining area, wooden casement windows have sashes and muntins painted a dark charcoal color. A built-in banquette faces a custom steel dining table. Chairs are from Restoration Hardware. **Above:** The kitchen island, with a Seagrass Limestone countertop, matches the warm tones of wood on the walls. The hanging pendant light fixtures are from Circa Lighting.



This page: Intimately scaled casement windows positioned over the bed brighten the master bedroom. Custom pillows are by Richard Tubb Interiors and bedside table is by Gabby. Middle: An interior French door lets natural light flow through rooms. Far right: The windowed master bath captures fresh lake breezes.







*“I always try to figure out as many ways as possible to get light into an interior.”*

*—Jeffrey Dungan*

Left: An open-air porch wraps around three sides of the home. The columns are made of Tennessee fieldstone and moss rock. This page: Architect Jeffrey Dungan, outside his office in Mountain Brook, designed the home so that all rooms have views to the lake.